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Exxii. 13

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The Lord Bishop of BRISTOL'S

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the RIGHT HONOURABLE

The LORD MAYOR,

T H E

ALDERMEN, and GOVERNORS
of the several Hospitals of the City
of *London*,

On *Easter Monday*, 1751.

COKAYNE, Mayor.

Tuesday the 16th Day of April,
1751. in the 24th Year of the
Reign of King George the Se-
cond, of Great Britain, &c.

IT is Ordered, That the Thanks of this Court be given to the Right Reverend Father in God the Lord Bishop of *Bristol*, for his Sermon preach'd before this Court, and the Governors of the several Hospitals of this City, at the Parish-Church of *St. Bridget*, on *Monday* in *Easter* Week last; and that he be desired to print the same.

M A N.

283
*The VIRTUE of being Merciful Stated
and Enforc'd.*

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By JOHN Lord Bishop of BRISTOL.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JAMES FLETCHER, in the *Turle*,
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M D C C L I,



 PROVERBS xi. 17.

The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul.

ONE of the most interesting Subjects, on which we can employ our Minds, relates to the Good and Evil of Life; and the Ways whereby the one may be procured and increased, and the other prevented or abated. The greatest indeed relates to the other World, in which our supreme Interests lie: But a proper Regard to the former must conduce likewise to these, as it implies Virtue or Duty on our Part, and so becomes a suitable Preparation for the Happiness which shall never end.

Indeed, when one considers the absolute Goodness of the Supreme Being, and finds that Attribute illustrated to us by the Provision made for the Happiness of his Creatures, one might be tempted to think every thing would succeed well; that we had nothing to do but to lay hold of the Good before us; and that Misery could no more subsist in Fact, than it could in the original Intention of our Creator.

Such

Such may be the Reflections of the merely speculative Man, unacquainted with the real Constitution of Things: But, in fact, the Happiness, which might be expected, is not attain'd; and the Misery, which might not be apprehended, prevails: Whence therefore these untoward Appearances?

The true Answer must be drawn from the Nature of Man, and the Constitution of the World; tho' both of them, on God's Part, most wisely fram'd, and pointed to the noblest Ends.

In reference to Man, if we consider him as an *intelligent* and *free* Creature, in the one respect he must be *fallible*, and in the other *peccable*: Whilst *fallible*, he may mistake his own Happiness; and as *peccable*, he may break in upon that of others: And thus may we account for Misery in some Sort, either as foolishly self-created, or maliciously produced in others.

To this may be added, That the System of Things about us, being govern'd by general Laws, can be subservient only to a general End; I mean, the common Good; or, if you please, the greatest Quantity of Good, upon the Whole, which can be produced under a wise Constitution. But in this case, it is plain, what the general Good requires may prove unfriendly

unfriendly to particular Interests; and so relative Evil may result from a greater and more general Good.

However, we may receive Comfort from reflecting, that, if under such a Constitution as this, Evil doth in some Degree prevail, yet this is still qualified by a proper Proportion of Good: That in case some are much less happy than others, yet, if they behave rightly under their present Circumstances, amends shall be made hereafter: That this Stage is but a short one, and only a Passage to another more enduring State: And that, whilst we are travelling thro' this short Passage, much may be done both by ourselves and others, not only to improve the Goods of Life, but to abate the Evils of it.

To this Purpose it is remarkable (and which argues the infinite Goodness of our Creator) that God hath implanted in us certain natural Inclinations, whereby we are led to advantage others, at the same time that we serve ourselves. Such particularly are *Goodness* and *Compassion*. By the one we are prompted to advance the Happiness of our Fellow-creatures; by the other, to relieve their Distresses: And whilst we act in Consequence of these Principles, we promote our own particular Happiness, and do ourselves enjoy the very Good which we do to others.

It

A SERMON preach'd before

It is not my present Design to treat of both these Principles (for they are in some Sort distinct from each other), but of the latter only: And even here the Text leads me rather to insist on the Habit, than the natural Principle or Inclination itself: From whence I may be led farther to speak somewhat of the several Acts or Instances, in which this virtuous Habit may shew itself.

What I shall offer on the present Subject, shall be reduc'd under the following Heads;

I. The Nature of the Virtue itself.

II. The Ground and Foundation on which it is built: And,

III. The strong Motives which may engage us to cultivate and display it.

As to the first, I must observe, That the natural Principle or Inclination, on which the Virtue now before us is built, is *Compassion*; or that State of Mind, in which every Man, not entirely degenerated, feels himself, upon the Presence of any miserable Object. By this Sort of inward Sense, the Distresses of others are made his own; and he is impell'd to attempt their Relief, with as real a Concern, as he is to defend or relieve himself.

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We perceive somewhat of this, even in the Brute Creation: Many of them run to the Relief of their own Species at least; and almost all of them express a Tendernefs towards their Young. Such wise Provision hath God made for the Support of the animal Creation! And thus *his tender Mercies are over all his Works.*

The Principle before us, we may observe, being in some Degree common to the greatest Part of the Animal Creation, must in that View be a blind and undistinguishing Principle. The Brutes having no Reason to direct it, must follow only as this Instinct itself calls them: And in Man the bare Inclination itself moves even before Reason can act: And tho' capable of being directed or restrained afterward, yet is of itself as undistinguishing in Man as other Creatures. It hath Respect only to Misery, as its Object; and operates where-ever that Misery appears.

Yet, tho' this Principle, consider'd in itself, and its first Motions, be somewhat the same both in the rational and irrational Part of the Creation, there is, however, a Difference in the Progress it makes, either in the one or the other. In Brutes it always operates to the just Extent of its Power, incapable of lessening or increasing. In Man it may admit of either, as his reasoning Power shall either check its Growth, or else forward it.

This carries me on farther: The Controul and Direction which Reason affords on this Occasion, whilst it contributes not to extirpate, but rather to favour and exalt this Principle, produces at length the virtuous Habit I am now treating of: For, *Compassion*, under the Command of *Reason*, and form'd by Practice into a steady and uniform Bent of Mind, makes the Character which the wise Man here sets forth, when he tells us, *The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul*.

The Inclination unmanag'd may carry us on to improper Objects, and urge us to very unwarrantable Measures: For Misery may be in some Cases deserved; or it may be necessary to produce a right Conduct in the suffering Person himself, as well as others. On such Occasions, the Compassion shewn will be Weakness. It may likewise lead us on, by indiscreet Indulgence, to increase the very Misery it would remove; and so, in the Result, produce as real Mischief, as even Cruelty itself could do.

But the Case is otherwise, when Compassion is put under the Direction of Prudence. It then prompts us, either to remove, or to abate, as much as we can, the general Unhappiness: And so, whilst it endeavours to lessen the Sufferings of some, will forbear to increase those of others.

In short, it moves to the Relief of those only who ought to be relieved: It proceeds just so far in pursuing Measures for this Purpose, as Wisdom allows it should do; and when check'd in its Progress, leaves the Mind under a certain Degree of Regret, that Wisdom, balancing on the real State of the Case, will not permit it to advance farther.

The Virtue of being *merciful*, as well as the *Compassion* on which it is built, hath Misery for its Object: And in this it differs in some Sort from *Goodness*, whose proper Object is Good: And the Exercise of these Virtues, thus distinguished, is in like manner different; for the one carries with it an Aversion to its Object, which it endeavours to remove; as the other implies a Love and Desire, which urges to obtain it: Tho' it may indeed be observed, that as the removing Evil is the first Step to Good, so the very Acts of Mercy itself may so far be ascribed to Goodness.

That Misery, about which the Virtue under present Consideration is conversant, may be distributed into two Classes: The one relates to our spiritual State, the other to our temporal.

As to that which relates to Man's spiritual State, it must be observed, That after this

Scene is clos'd, and *the Wicked are gone to their own Place*, as the Good shall have no Intercourse with them, so they shall have no Concern about them: Besides, their Misery being so highly deserv'd, and so strictly necessary, they must cease to be the proper Objects of Mercy.

What therefore belongs to the present Subject is, The preventing, whilst we can, and as far as we are able, this dreadful Consequence; whether, by supplying Men with the Principles of doing well, or by reclaiming them after having acted ill: For the State of Men under spiritual Darkness, let it be either of Ignorance, or of Error, or of Vice, may be consider'd as Misery of the worst Sort, tho' perhaps unfelt by those who labour under it; and which needing, doth on that account call for the tenderest Concern of good Men.

Misery, as it relates to our temporal Condition, is that which is commonly term'd Natural Evil; what is felt either in the Body or the Mind; and carries with it either some painful Sensations of the one, or else some inward, but not less afflicting Distresses of the other.

We may go on, and take Notice, that Misery, so far as the Subject before us is concern'd,

cern'd, may be consider'd either as present or future; as certain, or only probable: For Misery past, to the Person who hath escaped it, furnishes rather pleasing, than painful Sensations; and to others becomes Matter not so much of Pity as Congratulation.

Misery present is what we are principally concern'd about; and indeed what is sometimes said to be the only Object of Mercy: But this seems to carry the Matter too far, as shall be shewn immediately: Yet, I say, it is what this Virtue is principally conversant about; since that which is future or probable concerns us none otherwise, than because it certainly shall be, or probably will be present.

And here the Virtue before us prompts Men to endeavour, so far as they can, to remove this Misery, either in Whole, or in Part: Or, if this cannot be done, to abate the Sense of this Calamity, by expressing a tender Concern for the suffering Person, and by supplying such Materials as may enable him to bear what his Circumstances will not permit him to remove.

Misery future, or probably so, is, I reckon, as real an Object of Mercy as that which is present; and this, because, if certainly future, it will in a short time require the same Conduct as that which is now present: And, in
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the mean while, it allows a Provision of much Matter for Abatement, which present and urgent Misery may render us unfit to furnish. But that which is only probable, may yet be prevented: And if it be the Business of *Mercy* to remove or to abate present Suffering, it is equally concerned to hinder that which is likely to be hereafter. To this Purpose it is remarkable, that *Compassion* moves us as suddenly, and with as strong a Force, to succour a Person in immediate Danger, as under present Suffering; and to prevent, if possible, those Calamities which afterward it may not be able to remove.

Before I close this Head, it may be fit to observe somewhat concerning the Operations of this Virtue, as well inwardly upon the Mind itself, as outwardly upon the proper Objects of it.

As to the former, it being an Habit built on natural Compassion, and form'd by Reason and Prudence, it excites in the Mind a quick Sense or Feeling of the Miseries of others, in all Cases where we ought to feel them; *i. e.* in all Cases where it is fit we should move to their Relief, and in which we are able with good Effect to do so.

Perhaps on some Occasions it may go somewhat farther: For a tender-hearted and merciful

ciful Man may be so situated as to be able only to lament the Miseries of others. His outward Powers may be limited; but his Mind notwithstanding will not be the less affected. Possibly he may suffer the more inwardly on this very Account.

The pretended Philosopher, it may be, will reproach this Temper, and call it Weakness: For why should a Man be concern'd at that which he cannot help?—Why?—This is in some Cases a Reason, Because he cannot help it. And to cultivate such a Disposition, even in these Instances, preserves it for other Occasions of important Service hereafter.

Nor will it be sufficient to object, that hereby we bring needless Distress upon ourselves, whilst, not content with our own Share of Suffering, we take part in that of others. The Objection carries with it something senseless and inhuman: For, Men are naturally allied to each other. If, attending to this State of Things, they must *bear one another's Burdens*, they must likewise mutually enjoy one another's Advantages. And if our inward Feeling of another's Calamity be grievous for the present, yet 'tis a Suffering which the Mind itself approves of: 'Tis what it farther approves upon a subsequent Recollection: And the Sense from which the Suffering flows,

flows, is what a good Man would not choose to be free from, if he might.

The outward Exercise of this Virtue on its proper Object consists in the bringing speedy and effectual Relief, as far as we can, to the suffering Person; *the pouring Wine and Oil into the Wounds* of the injured Traveller, as our Saviour represents it; and the not *passing by on the other Side*, venting only some few useless Expressions of Pity. Real Mercy cannot bear the sufferings of others without endeavouring to relieve them, any more than our own Sense of Pain will permit us to sit down careless under it.

The Virtue before us is so far from neglecting those Miseries of others which it sees, that it searches after Objects of that kind, if capable of serving them. It even courts such Objects with as great Zeal, as Selfishness courts the Favour of the Powerful. It spares no Pains, and grudges no Expences this way, which it is capable of affording, or which are fit and proper to be laid out.

In short, notwithstanding the Uneasiness which the first Motions of this Virtue must always be attended with, and that Lessening of Fortune which must frequently arise from its outward Exercise, yet it builds up a Man's own real Happiness; which is secured and improved

proved by attending properly to the Miseries of other Men. And hence is it (as *Solomon* assures us), that the *merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul*.

II. After having offer'd thus much on the Nature, Object, and Exercise of this Virtue, it may now be proper to enquire somewhat into the Ground and Foundation on which it becomes a Virtue.

All Virtue supposes Understanding and Will in the Being capable of having it; which operating according to just Principles, and suitably to the Nature and Reasons of Things, the Habit itself is formed: And the future Cultivation and Improvement of it must be owing to the same Principles, to which it first owed its Rise.

As to the Instance before us, the Matter may be thus stated, and the Mind found to proceed in the following Order.

1. There is actually subsisting in the World a great Variety and Degree of Misery

2. Each Man is furnish'd with certain Abilities, whereby such Misery may either be prevented, or removed, or abated. And,

3. It

3. It is agreeable to the Nature and Reason of Things, that such Abilities should be exercised and applied to this Purpose.

The first Point hath been already touched on in the Beginning of this Discourse, where I not only observ'd the Fact, but suggested somewhat of its Causes. The Fact itself is notorious. For whilst we see it in others, we feel it likewise most sensibly in ourselves.

Of the Evils which Men labour under, some arise from the very Frame and Constitution of Things. Such are frequently Sickness, Pain, Heat, Cold, Hunger, Thirst, the Want not only of Conveniences, but Necessaries; insomuch that whilst we are solicited by natural Appetites, we are often so situated as to miss the very Opportunities of gratifying them.

Other Evils there are, which we ourselves create by following wrong Measures of Conduct. But, as we have no Ground to complain of these, so under them we scarce deserve Relief. And yet even here, the Suffering being grievous, and the Case not beyond Remedy, some Degrees of Compassion may be due to us.

There is another plentiful Source of Misery still behind; I mean the Folly and Wickedness

ness of Men contributing not only to make themselves unhappy, but others more so. And the natural Powers Men have of doing this are favoured by the frequent Opportunities of exerting them, which arise from the Dependencies which they have on each other, and mutual Connexions between them.

Men are capable indeed of doing Good to each other ; I mean, of promoting each other's Happiness : But much more of doing Hurt. To the former, considerable Degrees of Power may be necessary in many Instances : But no one is so insignificant as not to be capable of doing Mischief. From all these Causes, operating perhaps at once, there is no Reason to wonder if Evil prevails in a very high Degree, and that the State of a great Part of Mankind at least should be truly deplorable.

Indeed it may be question'd, whether, upon a due Balance, the Misery of Mankind in general during the present State doth not exceed their Enjoyments ; especially when we consider, that Occasions of Pain, in some kind or other, do perpetually recur ; — that these mixing with our Enjoyments spoil them ; — that the Good arising from our Enjoyments is at best low and transient, whilst the Evil accompanying is sharp ; — and that a very short, if pungent, Pain overbalances a much more durable Pleasure.

In these Circumstances what Relief can Man of himself procure? Little more than what arises from the Consciousness of his own Virtue (if virtuous he be), and from the Hope of a better State of Things hereafter. This indeed is considerable in the way of Abatement, and may enable him to bear up decently. But still it leaves him under his Sufferings; which, tho' in some degree qualified by this Mean, yet are not thereby removed.

Still our gracious Creator hath not left us destitute. If many of these Evils are caused by Man, by Man likewise may they be cured. And even those which arise from the present Constitution of Things may admit some Relief in the very same Way. Because,

2dly, Each Person is furnish'd with certain Abilities, whereby human Misery may be either prevented, or removed, or abated.

Indeed something may be done in this respect by not abusing their natural Powers. For, if Misery as well to others as to ourselves, follows that Abuse, then by correcting the Cause we must proportionably hinder the Effect. And if each Man would for himself studiously avoid the doing Mischief, a very considerable Part of the Misery which subsists would cease.

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But this is not what I am principally concerned to take notice of. The Abilities intended under this Head are of a greater Extent, and such as serve to assist Men under almost every Kind of Unhappiness.

All cannot indeed help each other in the same Way, and to the same Degree. Their Circumstances being different, their Powers, which are the Result of these Circumstances, must vary. But still every Man hath some such Sort of Ability; from the due Exercise of which no inconsiderable Consequence must arise.

The Rich, the Powerful, and the Wise, may assist Men by their Wealth, by their Interest, by their Skill; whilst others, in the lowest Circumstances, may bring suitable Relief in their own Way, — to those at least of their own Rank, with whom they have a closer and more intimate Correspondence. And if Persons of higher Rank be likewise assistant to these, whether by Direction or Encouragement, or by their Bounty, their Services will be still of greater Consequence. It is needless to enter into this Point more minutely, which will be best illustrated by each Man's own Observation.

3. It therefore remains to shew, that by exercising the foregoing Abilities to relieve the
Unhappy,

Unhappy, Men act agreeably to the Nature and Reasons of Things : And from hence the doing so must be strictly and properly virtuous.

We ourselves feel what Misery is, and would avoid it. Others being framed like ourselves, must be affected in the same manner, and would avoid it likewise. The Evil therefore is the same in both. And if it be in the Nature of Things fitting, that the Evil we would avoid should, as far as possible, be removed, it must likewise be so in the Case of other Men. Their Sufferings, if equally the Object of Aversion, must equally demand a Cure.

Originally God intended no Evil. That which arises from the Constitution of Things, is, rightly consider'd, *relative*, and the Result of a greater and more general Good. With regard to particular Men who suffer under it, perhaps sometimes it is little more than an Abatement of the Good of Life. Or if it prove more grievous, may still, in many Cases, be remedied by the kind Offices of other Men, who seem intended by Providence for correcting the bad Influence of general Laws on the Interests of single Persons. The Laws themselves are fit to be supported, because the common Good requires it ; but their accidental Operation to the Hurt of some must be equally as fit to be controul'd. And therefore,

therefore, since God hath thought fit not to interpose in an extraordinary Manner for this Purpose, He must be presumed to leave it to subordinate Agents. Power being given them to do this Work, the Reason of the Thing must be sufficient to direct this Power.

There are indeed Instances in which it is fitting that Men should suffer; and perhaps that they should continue in such a State without Remedy. These are out of the present Question. Yet I will venture to affirm, that where there is no such sufficient Reason for suffering, there must always be a Reason against it. Suffering, in such Cases, being an Evil, both in the Eye of him who labours under it, and of all those likewise who are Witnesses of it, must, as such, be disapprov'd by every Being not evil: Perhaps it is impossible to be approv'd in that View by any Being whatsoever.

If it should be said, that on this foot no Evil could be produced at all, it may be replied, that strictly speaking, God never produces Evil: For, even that which appears to be such to short-sighted Minds, if caused by Him, is upon the whole a Good. But then created Beings may produce it without Design; or, designing it to others, do hereby gratify some wrong Passion, or promote some mistaken Interest of their own: And possibly
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it may be worth inquiring, Whether absolute Malice can be ascribed to any intelligent Creatures any more than absolute Goodness.

But, whatever Judgment shall be past on those who have corrupted their Nature, and subdued the tender Sentiments originally implanted in them, yet every one not entirely degenerated will see Things better, and acknowledge the Principle I am speaking of: So that whilst labouring under Affliction himself he both desires and expects Relief, he will discern that others likewise, in the same Circumstances, must have the same equitable Expectations. And therefore, checking all undue Passions, and disregarding any interfering Interests of his own, he will move chearfully to their Relief, increasing his own Happiness whilst he removes, or lessens, the Unhappiness of other Men.

There is another Consideration to the same Purpose. No one condemns in others the Exercise of Mercy, if it be truly such; no not even those, who may be led by their own narrow Selfishness to forbear shewing it in their own Persons. It may cost them Pains, or put them to some Expence, to do so. This they like not; and therefore withdraw their Attention from such miserable Objects, as they cannot view without some Degree of Compassion, nor relieve but at their own Charge. Yet, if
another

another more tender-hearted Person should step in, and take such Objects off their Hands; Compassion will be suffered to return: The afflicted Man will be thought to have deserv'd Consideration; and the Reliever, whom they have not the Heart to imitate, they will praise. So reasonable and fitting a Conduct is this, that they cannot but express their Approbation of it in others, though by doing so they even condemn themselves.

III. It is time I should now proceed to my last general Head; *viz.* To propose such Motives as may induce Men to cultivate and display this Virtue.

The Text assures us, *The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul*; i. e. he promotes his own best and most important Interest, — his Happiness both in this World and the next. All Motives are comprehended under this: For it takes in the Whole of Self in its just and proper Sense; from which every kind of proper Motive must be drawn.

Now the first Consideration I would mention is this; the Virtue before us having its Foundation in the human Constitution, and being formed by Reason and Prudence, must in the Practice of it be agreeable, and in the Reflection comfortable.

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I have said, it is founded in Compassion ; — a Principle born with us ; and tho' capable, by a wrong Conduct on our Part, of being suppressed to a great Degree, yet is never totally extirpated. Even the most cruel and barbarous, — those who have harden'd their Hearts, and seem even to delight in Mischief, feel on some Occasions the Operation of this Principle. They have some favourite Objects at least, in whose Happiness they delight, and whose Distresses they cannot but pity. Or if a few Instances to the contrary may be produced, they will however be found such as were originally of a more tender Disposition, — such, as by the gradual Indulgence of the most execrable Vices have extinguish'd in themselves every thing properly human ; and so becoming Monsters in Nature, are Exceptions from its general Rules.

Be this however as it will, it is certain that the far greatest Part of Mankind retain this Principle to a considerable Degree ; and which they cannot, indeed would not, chuse to part with, though in its first Motions it is attended with an uneasy Perception, whilst it makes the Miseries of other People in some sort their own. They indulge themselves in it notwithstanding ; for it is natural to do so.

But then this Consequence arises (which is likewise the very Design of Nature), that the
Person

Person affected should move to the Relief of the suffering Person ; in doing which he finds a Satisfaction beyond what any other Kind of Enjoyment gives him. Of the Truth of this every one must be sensible in himself, if he recollects what pass'd whilst he was performing a generous and good-natur'd Action.

In truth, it cannot, according to the Nature of Things, be otherwise. For, if the first Motions of Compassion create in us a kind of Uneasiness, whilst it interests us in the Miseries which others suffer, then to exert ourselves for their Relief, is to relieve ourselves likewise. The Removal of their Calamities is the Removal of our own, since the Principle before us makes them such. The immediate Result must be a Complacence, and Self-satisfaction rather to be conceiv'd than expressed in Words.

I know not whether a great Part of what is accounted the Happiness of the present Life, doth not rather arise from the Removal of Uneasiness than from any positive Cause. Desire itself is always accompanied with something of this Nature, which the Gratification of that Desire removes. It is certainly so in the Instances of Hunger and Thirst, and perhaps of all the other natural Appetites whether of Body or Mind. In this Gratification we acquiesce.

From hence we become easy; and so far at this happy.

But in the Case which more especially concerns us at present, there is not only a Removal of Uneasiness, or a Gratification of Desire, but likewise a Consciousness of something worthy, and becoming in the Whole. We are not only pleased with what we are doing, but with ourselves in doing it. And in this the Satisfaction exceeds those of any other kind, — those at least which regard only the Senses, and concern Man not in his moral, but his animal Capacity. Such as terminate in the Senses, are of a lower kind, and must quickly expire; whereas those which principally regard the Mind, are of a higher Rank, and longer Continuance. For they not only imply something agreeable for the present, but comfortable likewise in the Reflection.

Other Enjoyments are such as are either vicious in their Nature, or else barely innocent. The former cannot be reflected on in a serious Hour without Remorse. For being inconsistent with Reason, when our Reason gets the Upper-hand, she will most assuredly condemn and punish them.

The Case indeed is otherwise, where Mens Enjoyments have been really innocent. There, as they have violated no Rules of Reason, they
must

must of course escape its Censures; but yet, as these have not flow'd from the Dictates of Reason, Men cannot expect Applause. The Pleasure enjoy'd, once over, is gone for ever, and can be properly revived no more.

It is still worse to consider, that rational Reflection on such past Enjoyments will create in us some sort of Uneasiness, whilst it excites a Desire which may not perhaps be gratified again, and in some Circumstances can never be gratified. Remembrance of this kind must be so far grievous.

But in the present Instance, whenever we look back, we enjoy the past Satisfaction anew. The Pleasure we had in moving towards the Relief of the suffering Person is doubled by considering that the End aim'd at hath been accomplish'd. We are not only pleased with having obtain'd this End, but with ourselves likewise; and have this farther Satisfaction, that the Judgment of every other reasonable Being concurs with and supports our own.

Yet, considerable as this is, a much stronger Motive will arise from what I shall chuse to observe in the next place; *viz.* that the Virtue before us being a Conformity to the Divine Nature, and its Exercise a Copy of the Divine Example, it must on these Accounts

approve

approve us to the Supreme Being, and recommend us to his more especial Favour.

The very same Arguments from whence we conclude the absolute Goodness of God, must prove him likewise to be merciful. For if He cannot but will the Happiness of his Creatures, so far as they are the proper Subjects of it, their Misery, while undeserv'd, must be proportionably displeasing to Him.

This, as it may be deduced from his absolute Perfection, is still farther illustrated from the Measures of his known Providence. But the strongest Manifestations appear in the Sacred Writings, where we are more distinctly taught what God is; and where He represents some of the Perfections of his Nature as the Patterns whereby we must improve our own.

In truth, there is no Divine Attribute more frequently or more expressly pointed out in Scripture than that of Mercy. *The Lord is merciful and gracious*, [Exod. xxxiv. 6.]; *full of Compassion*, [Ps. lxxxvi. 15.]; and unwilling that we should suffer under those very Judgments which we provoke, [Ezek. xviii. 21.]

This same Excellency which subsists in God without Bounds, and is indeed (if I may so speak) the favourite Perfection of his Nature,

ture, He inculcates likewise on us in the strongest Terms, and under the greatest Encouragements. Thus, *Blessed are the Merciful, for they shall obtain Mercy*, saith our Saviour, [Matth. v. 7.] Nay, he hath been pleased to carry the Matter so far, as to enforce the Exercise of this Virtue not only towards distressed Innocents, but even those who have provoked and injured us; to whom we are exhorted to shew Mercy as *our Father also is merciful*. [Luke vi. 36.] In consequence of these Directions, which our blessed Lord himself hath given, St. Paul in his Epistle to the *Ephesians* represents the Matter thus: After having exhorted them *to be kind to one another, and tender-hearted*, [Eph. iv. 32.] he immediately subjoins, *Be ye therefore Followers of God as dear Children*. [Eph. v. 1.] Here the being merciful is considered as an Imitation of the most perfect and merciful Being; and farther recommended on this Consideration, that we hereby act as *Children of God*, i. e. as Persons more especially endeared to Him.

Nor is it possible in the Nature of Things to be otherwise. For, what the Supreme Being contemplates in himself with infinite Complacency, He must, so far as it is imitated by his Creatures, approve, and love;
and

and what he thus approves and loves, he must of course reward.

I am led from hence to a third Consideration; *viz.* That at the last Day a principal Article of Enquiry will be this; Whether we have been merciful, or otherwise? See how our blessed Lord himself hath represented it in the xxvth Chapter of *St. Matthew*, where the Sentence to be pronounced on good Men is thus express'd; *Come, ye blessed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me Meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me Drink: I was a Stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye cloathed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in Prison, and ye came unto me, Matthew xxv. 34, 35, 36.*

That this Matter should be one Article in our great Account, must be presumed by every one who believes a future Judgment, if Mercy be really a Virtue, and the Practice of it on that Score a Duty: But it is remarkable, that in these Words none other Article is mentioned: And so our future Fate may seem determinable from this single Point.

Yet here let us stop a little, and be cautious; for our blessed Lord could never intend to be understood in such a Sense, as by exalting

ing one Virtue, to subvert and destroy all others. There is a great Variety of Duty incumbent on us, thro' our whole Course of Trial: And each of these will furnish out Matter for future Enquiry; when our eternal State shall be determined, by a proper Regard to every thing we have done. The Whole of our Life must be taken in; in which each single Duty must have its proper Place, and require its just Consideration. The right Sense therefore of the Words now cited must be this; That *Mercy* is a Point of the highest Importance; —a Point to which a principal Regard will be had; and consequently, we are infinitely concern'd most diligently to cultivate in this Life, what must have so great an Influence on our Happiness in another.

This, which our blessed Lord hath here taught us, we shall find supported by the Constitution and Order of Things. Thus is it, that God hath implanted in us such a constant Monitor as the natural Principle of Compassion. Thus is it he instructs us by the Measures of his Providence, both extraordinary and common. For this very Purpose hath he given us such frequent Opportunities to exercise this Virtue, by the Objects which every-where surround us; which being unprovided for, according to the ordinary Rules of his Administration, seem purposely intended to be reliev'd by us; especially as each Man hath some

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Power

Power of doing so, if he will rightly use it. To all this we may add, That every cool Reflection on Acts of Mercy recommends them farther, and enforces the Exercise of them more strongly.

Indeed, it is in some Sense natural to the Mind of Man to expect Mercy or Judgment hereafter, as he hath proved merciful or cruel in this Life: For when this Scene is closing, nothing is more apt to give Refreshment and Comfort, than the Reflection on Acts of Mercy; any Defects in which Regard, he endeavours to repair, by Benefactions, to take Place after Death. And on the other hand, every cool Remembrance of the Inhumanity with which he hath treated others, is grievous to him, and makes him even to abhor himself. Conscious of what he deserves, he dreads what to him seems approaching; and so, by anticipating the Judgment of Christ, he confirms it. What his own awakened Mind so strongly suggests, must be real: *For if our Hearts condemn us, God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things, 1 John iii. 20.*

I should now proceed to my last Motive, whereby the Practice of this Virtue may be enforc'd: —But I restrain myself a little, that after hearing the Report read, and offering one or two general Observations, I may return
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the Lord Mayor, &c.
with more Advantage to the Prosecution of
my Design.

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Here the Report was read.

On hearing what hath been now read, one cannot but express an Admiration of the Generosity of those, by whom such great Foundations were first erected and endow'd. The Numbers of the Miserable hence relieved, and the Variety of Cases to which this Relief extends, must affect a thinking and humane Person still more: So that 'tis scarce possible to attend this Day's Solemnity without Sentiments of Love, and Esteem, and Veneration for the Memories of those truly excellent Benefactors.

Yet you see, that extensive as their Views were, their Endowments have not answered the Greatness of their Intentions: Room hath been still left for the Generosity of future Times: And the Effect of these Charities would be much less, if not assisted by the Liberality of succeeding Benefactors. The present Age therefore claims its just Share of Praise: For if it were honourable to lay these Foundations at first, it must likewise be so to support them when decaying; to supply them when deficient; and much more to enlarge them in proportion to the growing Necessities of Mankind.

Indeed, I cannot forbear (and I hope it will not be thought a Digression from the proper Work of this Day); I cannot, I say, forbear taking Notice, that a tender and merciful Disposition seems to have improved amongst us, and to have become a special Character of the present Times. Witness the many new Erections suited to the various Wants and Distresses of the World: All these owe their Rise to more ancient Foundations, supported, supplied, and enlarged, as they have been by your Liberality; whose good Effects have been so sensibly felt, that we have now the Pleasure of seeing you imitated in many remoter Parts of the Kingdom: Nor is it any small Accession to your Praise, that those, who by their Distance, or by their Numbers, cannot be directly relieved by you, do in some respect owe the Relief they receive to your generous Example.

The Virtue described at large in this Discourse, is so important, and hath been so well illustrated by the Instances just now mentioned, that it deserves to be supported by every Motive we can allege. To this Purpose several have been produc'd already: But there is still another in Reserve, to which every serious Christian must give Attention. What I mean is this; In the Close of our blessed Lord's Account of the Proceedings of the last Day, he himself tells us, That the Mercy we have
shewn

shewn to our Brethren, he accepts as shewn to himself: And this intimates to us, not only the Certainty of a Reward, but the Greatness of it likewise.

Possibly our blessed Lord in this whole Account, and especially in this concluding Part of it, had a View to the then State of Things: For he saw, that the Religion he came to plant would be violently oppos'd; and, consequently, the joint Labourers in this great Work were concern'd to support each other as much as possible. He seems therefore to have stated the Matter in this Way, with an immediate View to their Encouragement.

But supposing this to have been the primary Intention of our Saviour on this Occasion, yet the Words may in a just Proportion be fitly applied to other Cases of Distress; all Christians being, in other Places of Scripture, represented as his Friends and his Brethren; and all Men being, in a certain Sense, equally the Sons of God.

Every miserable Object therefore, if really pitiable, should be pitied by us; and the Mercy which we shew on such Occasions, our blessed Lord will accept as shewn to himself.

He himself, if he were to act again on this
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Stage of the World, would, as he formerly did, shew his Compassion to the Miserable: And when he ascended, he did not intend to leave them friendless. What he would certainly do, if he were visibly present, that he requires his Followers to do for them; and this under the most moving Encouragement, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my Brethren, ye have done it unto me: — Of these my Brethren,* — Persons of the same Nature, which I myself assumed when I came into the World; — Persons, who, on this Account, are as really my Brethren as yours; allied to me by the very Nature of their Being; and, which is more, farther related by the very Circumstances of their Life: For Christ himself, during his State of Humiliation, was destitute and afflicted: And in this View, on some Occasions, wanted even charitable Assistance.

Indeed, there is a further Reason why our blessed Lord should propose the Encouragement before us: For, were he once more to return to this World, and pass thro' his former Course of Affliction, those who now bring Relief to the Afflicted, on the afore-mention'd Considerations, would be prompted by Reasons still stronger, to assist and relieve our blessed Lord himself: And therefore, since the Principles by which they are actuated, and which lead them to be merciful to others, would

would operate toward our blessed Lord's own Person, in similar Circumstances, we may see clearly why he puts such a Value on these Services, and places them to his own proper Account.

From hence we are sure of a Reward. No good Office done to others, shall in any-wise miss it; much less that which hath a special Reference to Christ himself; and where the very Ground and Reason of it both arises from, and ends in him.

But, is this all? By no means; it will be proportionable to the Dignity of the Work we have been employed about: The Mercy which we have shewn to others, will be consider'd as shewn to Christ; who is not only tender, but bountiful; and will repay us an hundred-fold for all we may expend in this Labour of Love.

What this Reward will be precisely, we are unable to conceive at present: *For now we see thro' a Glass darkly*, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Here we have a few Tastes of real Happiness allow'd us, and these scatter'd thro' a Life of Uneasiness and Pain: But from these, which serve to qualify the Uneasiness of our present Being, we learn to aspire after a more consummate Happiness to come; —an Happiness pure and unmix'd in its Beginning; —in its Progress ever improving;

improving; —and to be continued to us thro' a whole Eternity.

God grant that we may keep our Eye constantly fix'd on this great End! This will animate us in every Duty: And then neither the Hopes of Life, nor the Fear of Death, even the most cruel, can ever work so powerfully, as to induce us to fall from Him.

The E N D.



